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To: MHSOAC Commissioners
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The purpose of this memo is to help you in matters involving communication with the media. Developing public education strategies to overcome the stigma associated with mental illness is a significant charge of the OAC.

So is keeping the public and stakeholders informed on the progress that is being made toward a transformed mental health system that has prevention, wellness, recovery and resilience as its primary goals.

It is in the OAC's interest to develop and disseminate messages about the impact and potential of the MHSA. The media, whether newspaper, broadcast or Internet-based, is a potential partner in achieving this aim.

As time goes on, the public will want to know about the results of the monies dedicated by Proposition 63 – especially in this period of an impending state budget crunch. This fiscal year, it may be more vital than ever to spread the message of the importance of preserving those monies, and how critical it is for California to continue the implementation of the MHSA.

Following are some basic tips and guidelines to assist you in communicating to the public through the media:

WHEN THE PRESS CALLS YOU:

- Before speaking with the media, you, of course, have the option of turning first to the OAC communications staff for guidance.
- Allow your staff to assist you and to be useful in helping you shape your message in advance.

- We will do our best in helping you prepare in a way that frames your conversation with the media in a positive manner that supports the commission's overall mission.
- Reporters want to get the job done: As long as you get back to them by deadline, they will be perfectly satisfied with this initial response:

"Could you give me an idea of what type of information/input you're looking for? I'll take your number and get back to you as soon as I can."

- Most reporters will be happy to give you some idea of what their story is about, so don't hesitate to ask that, too. You might say:

"What is the theme or angle you are pursuing? I'd like to make sure I give you a quote that is on-point and relevant."

- You may want or need more information before forming your response. Other questions that are good to ask include:

"What is the topic or news angle of the interview/article?"

"What was the impetus for the story?"

"How much time do you need for the interview?"

"What kind of story is it? A news story? An issues story or investigative piece? A profile? A feature? A Q-and-A format?"

"May I ask, what is your familiarity with the topic? Are you covering mental health on a long-term basis?"

"Has your paper/news outlet done much on this topic in the past?"

The previous two questions, in particular, may give you an idea whether you should be prepared to speak from a broader, bird's-eye view, or in more detail about an ongoing issue.

Remember, they're calling for your thoughts as a commissioner, not as a private person. When you speak, you will be quoted in the context of your work on the OAC.

Don't say anything you wouldn't want directly associated with the commission. Also, assume that anything you say in the vicinity of a reporter will appear in the newspaper – even if you consider the reporter a friend.

Now that you've received that initial contact from the media, it's time to call your OAC communications team so we may be of assistance. You can use us as a sounding board – we'll give feedback, guidance, or share with you what you may expect. Just as important, we'll share with you tips on what you may want to steer clear of.

We will help you research information, form a response and give you background information about the media organization, when relevant.

One key thing to keep in mind when talking to the press: Know your audience. Are you speaking to people interested in helping the homeless on LA's Skid Row? Or are you addressing the needs of remote tribal councils? Respond with a message with your audience in mind.

WHEN WE CALL THE PRESS:

In keeping with our mission, the OAC's communications staff will want to help spread the word about the good works of the Mental Health Services Act and the OAC.

Sometimes we do this by suggesting a story to our press contacts, and guiding them to sources for certain information or balanced points-of-view.

In this case, we may ask you to talk to a reporter about an issue. It is important to follow-up if you are able, or let us know we need to recruit another commissioner for comment.

SHARE YOUR IDEAS WITH US:

When you hear of an interesting story – one that helps reduce stigma about mental illness, or spreads the word and furthers the goals of the MHSA or OAC, please e-mail or call us.

Because you are out there in the community, you likely will hear interesting stories about people, places, programs. Again, please e-mail or call us. Telling stories about mental health issues is a huge part of our mission.

The OAC's website will be a very important venue for story-telling, and we will count on you to contribute. We will be asking for your ideas, commentaries, thoughts and reflections on treating mental illness, reducing stigma and ensuring parity among our stakeholders. We will be looking for your papers or published works to post or link to, and also plan on doing profiles of each Commissioner.

NAVIGATING THE MEDIA INTERVIEW:

At this juncture, you've got in mind what you want to say, within a context that furthers the goals of the OAC and the MHSA. By this time, you've conferred with us -- your second set of ears and eyes.

Always speak on the record whenever possible.

When you develop a relationship with a reporter, you learn to whom you can speak freely. Then you can use the term "on background" to explain complexities without the risk of being taken out of context.

"On the record," "On background," "On deep background," and "Off the record" are more than just Deep-Throaty terms in the news business. To reporters, they have very specific, professional meanings and you should clarify these meanings when using the terms.

Please read these definitions carefully and follow them:

- **"On the record":** When you speak on the record, everything you say to a reporter may be used and attributed to you by name.
- **"On background":** When you tell a journalist you are speaking on background, he or she may publish what you say but cannot attribute it to you by name or title. Rather, the reporter attributes your statements to a previously agreed upon identification, such as "a well-informed source" or "an expert" or "a government official" or "a government appointee."
- **"On deep background":** When you establish before an interview that you are speaking only on deep background, a reporter may use the information but without giving any attribution. Anything said in the interview is usable but not in direct quotation and not for attribution.
- **"Off the record":** When you speak off the record, you give a reporter information that is for his or her knowledge only and that cannot be used, printed, or made public in any way. A reporter should not take the information to another source in hopes of getting official confirmation.

